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AUTHOR Naulty, Deborah
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ABSTRACT

By emulating traits of high-performing corporations such as those described in the book "In Search of Excellence," the library/information profession can also reach the goal of excellence. Attributes characterizing excellent companies include exhibiting a bias for action; maintaining quality service through closeness to the customer; encouraging creativity by giving employees more autonomy; achieving productivity through people by showing respect for all employees as individuals; adopting and applying a basic philosophy; and finally, maintaining a balance between firm control and maximum individual creativity. Application of these universal policies for sound management, maintenance of active involvement and use of imagination can make excellence possible in the information world.
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EXCELLENCE IN LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

Deborah Naulty
Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

Currently there are a wealth of books focusing on improving contemporary American business. Lee Iacocca's autobiography, the story of an immigrant's son rise to the top at both Ford and Chrysler Corporations, has set a record for general-interest nonfiction with 2,610,000 copies sold so far in 1986.¹

The only nonreference books that have sold more hardback copies than Iacocca's are Gone With the Wind and Jonathan Livingston Seagull. "I never thought the day would come when they'd be comparing me to Rhett Butler," said Iacocca.

One of the bellwethers of this trend of best selling business books was In Search of Excellence by Peters and Waterman.² In this book, the authors outline and define the characteristics that are found in the most successful American companies.

The purpose of this paper is to apply the criteria of these successfully managed corporations with the goals of achieving excellence in the library/information profession. If IBM and McDonald's can be consistent top performers by applying these basic principles, why not use these same principles as guidelines to strive for excellence in the library and information world?

The first attribute characterizing an excellent company is a bias for action. Giving ideas a test run immediately. Now, 1986, is the perfect time for implementing new library technology. Librarians are surrounded by either microcomputers or by talk of microcomputers. Why not jump on the bandwagon and put those micros to use?

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The computer applications used most successfully in a library setting are word processing and electronic spread-sheets. Using the computer for word processing alone will justify its purchase. Library procedures consist of so much repetitive typing. The staff is forever updating book lists, routing stickers, periodical holdings and bibliographies. A word processing software package, such as, Word Star, Volkswriter or Word Perfect can double the productivity accomplished by an electric typewriter.³

In our library, we entered our periodical holdings list on an IBM PC, and now we are able to add or delete entries instantly. This has enabled us to keep our list current without the hassle of retyping every title.

Learning how to use a spread-sheet program like Visi Calc, Lotus 1-2-3 or Multiplan does not require extensive knowledge of computers, in-depth training or computer programming skills. A one day workshop, with hands-on experience, is enough to get one started. It may take a few more weeks of practice to master all the other various possibilities, but it will be well worth the effort. Take the initiative and get started. Join the excellent companies by encouraging quick action and a willingness to try new things.

Quality service is the second principle to emulate. The greatest library collection in the world would be useless without the skilled services of a knowledgeable staff. Keeping in close contact with the library users is one of the most effective ways to provide and maintain the quality of client service. Anticipating the patrons' needs can only be accomplished if everyone pays attention to the daily requests and inquiries made by the users, customers, clients or members.

Directors, managers and department heads should regularly spend time performing all customer support tasks, such as, answering reference

questions, circulating material, locating books and whatever else is necessary to satisfy the users' quest for information.

Measuring patron satisfaction frequently is another sign of excellent management. Equal weight should be given to quality as well as quantity of service. Response time and accuracy of information should count as much as courteous and respectful treatment.

The next trait of excellency is giving all employees autonomy so everyone can be creative. Encouraging all staff members to contribute new ideas on procedures and services. After all, it is the library staff that works face to face on a daily basis with the patrons, therefore their input will be invaluable.

Our library was fortunate to employ an alert clerical worker who completely streamlined the clipping service we provide for our executives. Her innovative approach is still being used today.

Innovations on improving library service, revitalizing collection development and enhancing interlibrary loan procedures are always welcome in an excellent library. These ideas must be risk-free, there can be no wrong suggestions. The staff has to be convinced there is a great deal of interest in what they have to say, which means no one gets zapped for asking a tough question or challenging a managerial proposal.

Closely related to autonomy is the goal of productivity through people. Respect for all employees as individuals is a concept excellent management follows.

The library staff is special and they should always be made to feel that way. It is important to make everyone feel involved in the success of the library; training and cross training should be provided. The acquisitions technician should be able to handle the circulation duties,

likewise, the circulation assistant should feel confident verifying a book title in Cumulative Book Index.

It is essential to provide opportunities for development to the staff members who want to improve their skills, expand their career goals, or simply further their general education. To paraphrase Douglas McGregor, people will be more productive if they are treated with respect.

The next important concept for striving for excellency is adopting a basic philosophy and applying it. Most libraries are not independent organizations, they exist within larger organizations. The public library is funded by a municipality, the academic library is part of a university and the special library may belong to either a non-profit organization or a for-profit corporation.⁴

The key to success of the library is the creation of an environment where the staff feels free to give their best to the organization, where they feel motivated, committed and happy about their workplace and themselves. In short, creating a vital place to work. Creating an image of excellency, in every aspect which includes: information and reference service, public relations, collections development and technical advancement. Stand for quality.

While the day to day objective of the library will change as the demand for information changes, the overall goals or mission of the library should remain the same. To serve the information needs of the parent organization with the highest degree of excellence.

The last sign of a superior institution is difficult to describe, it entails simultaneous loose-tight properties; pushing autonomy down to the clerical level, while, at the same time, conforming to the rigid standards

of excellence set by upper management. It is a delicate balance between firm control and maximum individual creativity.

Loose traits involve telling the staff what they are expected to accomplish and then sitting back and allowing them to do it. People want the opportunity to think and contribute; they want the opportunity to be involved both physically and intellectually in their work.

But at the same time, a remarkably tight and controlled value system is present. A focus on serving the end user, giving excellent service and doing the best one can. Thus a set of shared values and rules can provide the framework for the library staff to contribute, add ideas and maintain a high quality of service.

In conclusion, in order to achieve excellence, the special library needs a philosophy, a value system or an objective. A driving force behind an excellent information center is user-oriented service. Providing the right information at the right time to the right user.

Just having a positive user-oriented mission is not enough. Management must be able to communicate a clear picture of exactly how important these goals are. A staff with a common purpose is very productive. Let the staff know they are expected to treat their work with commitment and their clients with enthusiasm, and they will not disappoint you.

Good leaders show concern and understanding for the feelings of their subordinates, while encouraging them to take the initiative and demonstrate creativity. Employees want to be informed and be in positions to productively contribute to their customers well-being. The opportunity to successfully help another person contributes to one's own self-esteem. The feeling of pride and achievement is often contagious.

Well-defined management procedures and open communication between all library staff members is crucial. By emulating many of the traits of the high performing corporations, and by active involvement and imagination, the goal of excellency can be reached in the library/information profession. Our libraries can be excellent.

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